

# HEADWATERS



2016 NEWSLETTER & 2016-2017 ANNUAL REPORT, ISSUE 53

NYS TUG HILL COMMISSION · DULLES STATE OFFICE BUILDING · 317 WASHINGTON STREET · WATERTOWN, NY 13601 · (315) 785-2380 · WWW.TUGHILL.ORG



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## Commission Celebrates 43 Years of Service

Over 90 people attended the Tug Hill Commission's 2016 annual dinner, held at the Tailwater Lodge & Barn in Altmar in November. Attendees were able to view the new Venerable Folks of Tug Hill exhibit (see article on page 3) and many attendees took tours of the new Tailwater facility, a great example of adaptive reuse of an abandoned building, in this case a former elementary school.



The Barn at Tailwater Lodge, Altmar NY.

The evening's keynote speaker was Ken Lynch, Executive Deputy Commissioner of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and former Region 7 Director. Ken's presentation highlighted many of the ongoing efforts of DEC on Tug Hill, including ownership soon of 2,800 acres of National Grid land along the lower

Salmon River and Salmon River Reservoir, the new Tug Hill Traverse non-motorized trail being built in the core forest, and the pending acquisition of over 3,000 acres of former Harden property in the towns of Orwell and Redfield.

The evening concluded with a year-in-review presentation by Executive Director Katie Malinowski, as well as a look forward to priorities in 2017. The full presentation can be viewed on the commission's website. ■

### New Tug Hill Video

The Tug Hill Commission released its first informational video in 2016, designed to provide information about Tug Hill and what the commission provides to the region. The video highlights the uniqueness of Tug Hill and its natural resources, as well as recreational opportunities.

Special thanks to Don Alexander from Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency for volunteering to narrate the video, and to Jackie Hobbs with the NYS Old Tyme Fiddlers' Association for use of her fiddling music. Staff member Mickey Dietrich donated the aerial footage and Betty

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# Meet the Staff at the NYS Tug Hill Commission

Commission staff provide support to Tug Hill councils of governments in community and economic development, land use planning, natural resource management, geographic information systems (GIS) and related fields.

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Front row, left to right: Jennifer Harvill, Gwen Decker, Carla Fowler, Jennifer Armstrong-Symonds. Second row, left to right: Katie Malinowski, Felicia Passino, Jean Waterbury, Kathy Amyot, Angie Kimball. Back row, left to right: Mickey Dietrich, Matthew Johnson, Paul Baxter, Philip Street.

**“Helping local governments and citizens shape the future of the Tug Hill region”**

## Minimum Maintenance Roads at Risk

Rural communities across the state have been adopting low volume/minimum maintenance roads laws for the past two decades under home rule law. The purpose of the designation is primarily to avoid winter plowing. Concurrently, there have been several iterations of a low volume roads bill introduced in both the senate and assembly, to provide state authority for the designation. Unfortunately, to date no bill has passed both houses. Numerous municipalities and councils of governments on Tug Hill have passed resolutions in support of the proposed legislation, and will likely do so again for this session's newly introduced bills, S025371 and A00418.

In March of 2016 the Weikel decision out of Lewis County Supreme Court added significantly more pressure to get state

legislation passed. The decision upheld a lawsuit brought by a landowner along Bower Road in West Turin against the town. The decision, which would force West Turin to plow the road, has been stayed while under appeal with the NY Appellate Division's 4th Department.

On Tug Hill, ten towns have minimum maintenance road laws on the books, with seven towns pending, awaiting the outcome of the court case and appeal. Total existing mileage of minimum maintenance roads on Tug Hill is approximately 158 miles; almost 50 miles of that has state land on both sides, and an additional 33 miles of road has state land on one side. The amount of state land along these roads makes the necessary upgrades problematic especially in Lewis and Oneida counties, which

are forest preserve counties. Of the roads without this potential problem, some estimate that it would cost on average \$100,000 per mile to upgrade roads and buy necessary equipment, primarily to keep the roads plowed

in the winter.

The commission continues to monitor the topic closely, providing information and opportunities for discussion among stakeholders. ■

Dodge Road in the town of Lorraine.



## ABOUT HEADWATERS

Headwaters is the annual newsletter report of the NYS Tug Hill Commission.

The Tug Hill Commission is a state funded, regional agency overseen by a board of nine unpaid commissioners - two each from Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, and Oswego counties, and one at-large.

Commissioners are appointed for five year terms: three each by the Governor, State Senate and State Assembly. The commission has an administrative link to New York State's Department of State.

## CHAIRMAN

Jan J. Bogdanowicz  
Lewis County

## MEMBERS

Leona M. Cheresnoski  
Jefferson County

## VICE CHAIRMAN

Michael G. Yerdon, Sr.  
Oswego County

Roger W. Maciejko  
Lewis County

Arnold E. Talgo  
Oneida County

## SECRETARY

Thomas E. Boxberger  
Jefferson County

Kenneth W. Vigus  
Oneida County

# New Exhibit Features Venerable Folk of Tug Hill

This exciting new multi-media exhibit is the result of a collaboration between artist Loretta Lepkowski, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, Tug Hill Commission, and Traditional Arts of Upstate New York. The people selected as Venerable Tug Hill folk exemplify the traditions and spirit of Tug Hill. They represent resourceful and hardy people: the farmers, loggers, and mill workers contributing to their communities in so many ways serving on local town boards, in schools, libraries, churches, and other organizations. Carrying on the traditions of hunting camps, Old Tyme fiddling, and food and dance festivals that celebrate their heritage, these venerable folk are passing on the Tug Hill way of life to the next generation.

Building on the original portrait series painted by Lepkowski, the exhibit documents these individuals through portraits, pictures, audio and video. All of the participants were interviewed in their homes using a combination of video and audio recordings, and their stories and remembrances shape the exhibit content. Their willingness to take the time to

share their life stories and Tug Hill adventures is what makes the exhibit a success.

The portable exhibit includes a large vinyl panel explaining the exhibit and the region, and seven popup panels. The content on the seven smaller panels is organized around the following themes:

- Where Did They Come From?
- Growing Up On Tug Hill
- Musical Traditions
- Embracing Winter
- Living Off The Land
- Forestry and Farming
- Community Spirit

Those interviewed for the project and painted for the portraits are: Francis Yerdon, Angie Kimball & Elaine Yerdon, Jim Burke, George Capron, Irvine Buchal, Leona Chereshnoski, Warren Mathis & Bob McNamara, Ben Coe, Doug Barclay, Martha Deming, Ed "Doc" Russell, Szalach Brothers, Terry & George Cataldo, Weiman Brothers, and Bob Sauer.

More images of the exhibit can be found at [www.tughill.org/about/tug-hill-sages/venerable-folks-of-tug-hill/](http://www.tughill.org/about/tug-hill-sages/venerable-folks-of-tug-hill/). ■



*Pictured Above: Leona Chereshnoski, Tug Hill Commissioner, next to her portrait and biography.*



*Pictured Above: Attendees at the Annual Tug Hill Dinner viewing the Venerable Folks of Tug Hill Display. From left to right: Francis Yerdon, Carol Yerdon, and Betsy Mack.*

## Third Village Slated to Dissolve

The village of Herrings, located within the town of Wilna in Jefferson County, will dissolve March 31, 2017. The 90-resident village was presented with an electorate-initiated petition in July of 2015 and held a referendum the following November that resulted in a 19-9 vote in favor of dissolution. Article 17-A of NYS General Municipal Law holds that the board meeting following the referendum begins a 180-day period in which a dissolution plan be prepared that, in part, analyzes the fiscal costs of dissolution, assets and their fair value, liabilities and indebtedness, and propose terms for their disposition. In short, the plan must summarize how residents will continue to be furnished municipal services should the town take them over.

Herrings formed a dissolution committee, a ten-member group of stakeholders representing residents, the village, and the town that met monthly to prepare the plan by the June 6, 2016 deadline. Tug Hill Commission and Department of State staff were asked to provide technical assistance. Commission staff assisted the group

in preparing the 53-page village of Herrings Study and Implementation Plan. Both municipalities have applied for grant funding to help offset expenses associated with dissolution, such as legal fees, also with the commission's assistance.

Herrings will be the third village to dissolve in the region in recent years. On June 1, 2013 the village of Altmar dissolved into the Oswego County town of Albion and on December 31, 2015 the village of Prospect dissolved into the Oneida County town of Trenton. ■



# COGREPORTS

COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENTS REPORTS

## Cooperative Tug Hill Council

The Cooperative Tug Hill Council (CTHC) completed their multi-year highway mapping in 2016, with all 16 CTHC towns approving official highway maps. In other highway news, West Turin received a judicial decision in late March which overturned their minimum maintenance road law. See page 2 for more information about this case and efforts to get low volume roads legislation passed at the state level.

The council's towns continue to work on updating their special area protection program under

the Tug Hill Reserve Act, with two additional updated special area maps approved in 2016, for a total of 12 approved to date.

Justice courts continued to be an issue in 2016. The towns of Lorraine and Worth are involved in a study of options for a possible court consolidation. Boylston also has a justice vacancy and has begun to consider options. The justice for the combined Harrisburg/Montague/Pinckney court was re-elected in November.

2016 also saw several proposed

new wind projects to the region and the CTHC towns of Harrisburg, Pinckney, Montague, Martinsburg, Rodman, Redfield and Worth in particular. Two representatives of proposed projects attended the council's fall meeting to provide information and answer questions.

With help from the Justice Court Assistance Program and a NYS Archives grant, the town of Lewis completed renovations for new municipal offices. Using volunteer help in addition to contractors, the new build-

ing is universally accessible and provides office space for town officials, a shared meeting room/justice courtroom, a fireproof and secure records storage facility and space for their library.

CTHC's website was overhauled in 2016 with help from Riverside Media in Clayton. The updated website uses WordPress for easier editing and updating. Work is ongoing to review the existing pages and links and add new content. ■

## Northern Oneida County Council of Governments

Sales tax distribution and shared services were dominant themes in NOCCOG communities during 2016.

Following the formation of a committee by County Executive Anthony Picente tasked with evaluating a potential change to the current sales tax distribution formula, local officials began networking to ensure participation in the process. For many rural Oneida County towns and villages,

sales tax revenue accounts for a substantial portion of their budgets. Town of Lee Supervisor John Urtz was one of the appointees to the committee, providing a voice for NOCCOG municipalities. The process will continue into 2017.

With revenue streams shrinking and costs rising, many local officials are working together to explore and implement shared services. The northeastern portion of NOCCOG has found success in the sharing of

Trenton's recycling center with Remsen and Steuben. Those communities are now exploring the creation of an ambulance district to maintain and improve ambulance service.

NOCCOG and commission staff assisted the towns of Ava and Floyd with Consolidated Funding Applications for park construction and improvements. Implementation of two large grants in the village of Camden in 2015 is underway

and will soon result in tangible changes within the village.

NOCCOG staff, working with the commission and the Local Government Education Committee of Oneida and Herkimer Counties, has provided training on issues ranging from newly elected officials, Geographic Information System (GIS), zombie properties and land banks, planning and ZBA topics, and March's local government conference. ■

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# North Shore Council of Governments

The village of Central Square is evaluating sign replacement options at the village hall on East Avenue, including various electronic sign options, to make the sign easier to update and more informative.

The village of Cleveland made progress in its efforts to rehabilitate the Cleveland Dock when the Oswego County Economic Development and Planning Committee and the Finance and Personnel Committee voted to establish a capital project. Economic Development and Planning Committee Chairman Roy Reehil, county legislator representing Constantia and Cleveland, was authorized to execute documents related to the project.

The town of Constantia applied for, and was awarded, a \$2.8 million grant to expand availability of public water into the eastern portion of town, along NYS Route 49 east from the vicinity of Taft Bay to the western boundary of the village of Cleveland.

With the Central New York Raceway Park still under development in the town of Hastings, Super DIRT Week was hosted by Oswego Speedway, which turned its paved oval into a dirt track for the October event. Video of the transformation process can be found on the Speedway's web site, [www.oswegospeedway.com](http://www.oswegospeedway.com). Super DIRT Week has confirmed Oswego Speedway as the 2017 event site, while Central New York Raceway Park continues efforts toward completion.

The town of West Monroe continued to work on review and update of the town's land development regulations. The town has also been looking for ways to save money and increase efficiency, including implementation of a new phone system in the town hall, and in December, acting to move ahead on conversion of street lights to newer and more energy efficient LED technology. These efforts have contributed to the town's lower tax levy for 2017. ■

# Salmon Rivers Council of Governments

The town of Albion continued exploring the feasibility of public water, with the award of a grant to survey town residents to determine where public water was wanted or needed, and development of cost estimates necessary for creating a water district should the project prove feasible and have public support. A majority of residents in the potential service area favored public water, and the project now has an estimated cost of close to \$11 million to serve nearly 500 equivalent dwelling units.

The town of Amboy initiated a review of utility services being purchased by the town, resulting in cost savings that contributed to the town's ability to stay under the state's tax levy cap in 2017, despite increases in costs in other areas of the budget.

Parish achieved its objective of high speed internet town-wide through the NYS ConnectNY Rural Broadband grant program. New Visions completed stringing cable, and high speed internet went live in mid-2016. The town

**Continued on page 8**



View of the Black River from Crown Cleaners site in the town of Wilna.

# River Area Council of Governments

RACOG grew in 2016, as the village of Deferiet requested to become a member of RACOG, joining Carthage, West Carthage, Wilna and Champion. Additionally, Wilna, Carthage and Deferiet all approved an inter-municipal agreement to create a seven-member joint planning board in 2016.

As detailed in the article on page three, local officials from the

village of Herrings worked with Wilna and appointed representatives to develop a village dissolution plan which will go into effect on April 1, 2017.

With building demolition, soil & debris cleanup efforts completed by EPA at the Crown Cleaners of Watertown Inc. Superfund Site, Wilna is moving ahead with design of the 9.2 acre waterfront

**Continued on page 8**



# The Changing Energy Landscape

## *The New Energy Standard*

New York adopted the Clean Energy Standard in 2016, with goals for a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, 50% of electricity generation from renewables, and significant increases in energy efficiency, all to be achieved by 2030. Below are efforts related to energy and renewables directly relevant to Tug Hill communities.

## *ANCA Energy Circuit Riders for Jefferson and Lewis Counties*

Modeled on the success of the Tug Hill Commission's circuit rider program, the Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA) has a team of energy circuit riders (ECR) to help municipalities and school districts in Jefferson and Lewis counties achieve significant savings in energy costs. ECRs are helping leaders understand programs and financing opportunities for capital improvements that reduce energy consumption and/or increase the amount of renewable energy in municipally owned buildings. The commission assisted ANCA in defining ECR job roles and with insights in the role of the circuit rider.

## *Proposed Wind Farms*

In the Tug Hill region alone, 2016 saw six wind energy projects in various stages of development. In light of these new projects, the commission released a new issue paper entitled *The Next Generation of Wind Farms on Tug Hill*. Available on the commission's website, it summarizes the current wind farm proposals, and discusses topics that municipalities may consider regarding wind farms in their communities.

## *Article 10 Training*

The commission co-hosted a workshop with Jefferson County on Article 10 in November, to help local officials better understand the Article 10 law and process. Over 100 local officials and citizens attended, with NYS Department of Public Service's General Counsel Paul Agresta providing a thorough and understandable overview of Article 10. ■



Maple Ridge Wind Farm looking west on NYS Route 177, town of Harrisburg.



Circuit riders. Front row, left to right: Jennifer Armstrong-Symonds, Paul Baxter. Back row, left to right: Kathy Amyot, Angie Kimball.

## Circuit Riders Deliver Services

Within the region's 2,100 square miles are five councils of governments (COG's), each comprised of various numbers of towns and villages sharing common geographical and governmental needs. COGs are independent units of local government created through intermunicipal agreements signed by all member communities. They are governed through by-laws, budgets and policies adopted by their respective executive boards, and are an integral partner in the delivery of programs and services of the commission.

Providing direct support to each COG is a circuit rider who is a commission employee residing near or within each COG tasked with attending local municipal board meetings and providing immediate assistance and extended support to more complex projects. The four circuit riders in total attend an average of 75 meetings every month across the region. By being available on site at meetings, local officials have access to sometimes immediate answers to questions. Some examples of issues circuit riders encounter and assist with are those such as filling board vacancies, following appropriate procedures for executive sessions, or development of local laws.

Circuit riders also play an integral role in communications between local governments, Tug Hill Commission staff, and outside agencies. Specialized assistance can include research of funding opportunities and aid with preparing grant applications, comprehensive plan development and updates, and zoning and land use regulations updates. As regular attendees at monthly and special meetings, circuit riders build relationships with local officials and acquire institutional knowledge about their communities that extends beyond individual administrations.

Frequently, questions and issues are not unique to single communities. Circuit riders acquire experience that can be shared between communities and serves as a basis to build capacity for local officials to solve problems. They also listen for patterns and can provide referrals to outside resources and training opportunities. Although technology has changed dramatically over the past 30 years allowing greater and rapid access to information and communication, there is no replacement for direct contact and personal relationships. ■

# Local Officials Access Training

In 2016, the commission organized or assisted in organizing 16 training sessions, with over 1,200 local officials attending these sessions. The one-day local government conference (LGC) held on March 31st at Jefferson Community College in Watertown was the 27th annual event of its kind with 30 different sessions held throughout the day. Over 650 local officials from around the north country attended. In addition to the LGC, sessions on a variety of topics were held throughout the year in the Tug Hill region. Workshop topics included: newly elected training, red flags for fraud, planning and zoning roles and responsibilities, subdivision review, comprehensive plans, emerald ash borer, town budget process, zombie properties and land banks, wind energy, and Public Service Law Article 10.

When topics arise that are of concern to many Tug Hill municipalities, commission staff develops issue or technical papers to provide information and background in a concise, organized manner. In 2016, the commission produced two new issue papers and updated two technical papers. A total of 14 issue papers and 16 technical papers can be found on the commission's website.

- Justice Court Consolidation Solutions – New issue paper
- The Next Generation of Wind Farms on Tug Hill – New issue paper
- Municipal Fundraising and Gifting – Updated technical paper
- Forming a Not-for-profit Corporation in NYS – Updated technical paper ■



## Commission Funding 2016-17

Another year of level funding for Tug Hill Commission! Our budget remained right around \$1 million for the fifth year in a row. Almost all of the commission's funding comes from its annual state appropriation. Approximately 85% of the budget is spent on salaries, with the balance covering commission operating expenses.

In 2016-17, commission staff helped partner communities and organizations secure over \$1 million in grant funds, trained more than 1,200 local officials and started working on 23 new projects across the region, maintained progress on over 50 additional projects and answered technical assistance questions, too numerous to count. Staff also worked with state agency partners on a va-

riety of statewide priorities and initiatives.

The commission employed 13 staff, four of whom are circuit riders for the region's five councils of governments. The other nine staff members provide program and administrative support out of the commission's office located in Watertown. Commission staff provide support in many areas including planning, community development, natural resources and GIS.

The commission will continue to look for fiscal savings while sustaining vital services to the Tug Hill region and look forward to helping towns and villages throughout the region in the coming year. ■

## Helping Communities Chart Their Future

Commission planning staff were busy in 2016 working with Tug Hill communities to develop and revise a variety of land use laws and comprehensive plans. Zoning work is ongoing in the towns of Ava, West Monroe, and Vienna and the villages of Parish and West Carthage. The commission continues to provide assistance with digital zoning maps and updates.

Requests for comprehensive plans and plan updates continue to be very steady as communities become more familiar with their advantages. In 2016, commission staff were involved in work with Champion, Leyden, Lorraine, Parish, and Steuben. Over the last several years, we have developed two plan templates for towns and villages – one for larger/more complex communities and one for smaller, more rural communities.

Local planning assistance to town and village boards, planning boards, zoning boards of appeals and enforcement officers remains a high priority for commission planning staff. Requests for technical assistance on a wide variety of planning issues continue to be steady. Along with the annual training sessions for planning officials featured at the local government conference at Jefferson Community College in March, training was also offered in 2016 through a series of evening workshops. See article above for more about topics covered. ■



## NYS TUG HILL COMMISSION

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JANUARY 2017

## Tug Hill Video

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Haig with the Boonville Herald, Lewis County Soil & Water Conservation District, and commission staff provided photographs that were used in the video. ■

## RACOG

Cont. from page 5

property to become a recreation park facility. With \$75,000 awarded through the 2016 CFA process, the town will contract for professional architectural and landscaping services to document the community's shared vision and provide recommendations to guide a phased approach in constructing the recreation park.

Assisted by the Tug Hill Commission, Champion appointed an ad hoc committee to review, build upon and update their comprehensive plan to guide future

development. Likewise, local planning and municipal officials from West Carthage reviewed and amended the village zoning map as part of a comprehensive plan update.

Additionally, Champion and West Carthage continue to explore potential shared services in the justice court arena, and Wilna is implementing a shared dog control officer through private contract to extend service into the villages. ■

## Salmon Rivers

Cont. from page 5

and village continue to explore options for bringing public water to Parish.

The town and village of Parish are also working on bringing natural gas to the town, and in 2016 they began to explore alternate means of getting natural gas to Parish for local distribution. One avenue they have

looked at is a system whereby a company would bulk-ship natural gas to a depot in town, feeding a local distribution system. Because one possible method of providing distribution would be via a municipal system, Parish began outreach to other municipalities in NYS to learn from their experience with providing natural gas.

The town and village of Parish also began to explore what potential there might be, and what obstacles may exist, for

salmon to once again run in the Little Salmon River, which runs through Parish on the way to Lake Ontario.

The clock in the tower of the town hall in Orwell is working once again, with replacement of the original early 20th century vintage mechanical clockworks with an electronic mechanism. The original chimes have been retained and are sounded via an electronic activator. Orwell also has a town wide reevaluation underway. ■



Salmon River Falls, town of Orwell.